

**HOMAN (G.)**

*With Compliments of Author.*

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AS A

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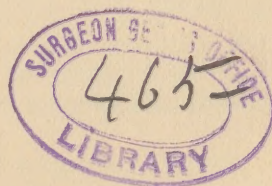
# LAND LIBERATION AS A PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURE.

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PRESENTED AT THE NINETEENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE  
AMERICAN PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION, KANSAS  
CITY, OCTOBER 20-23, 1891.

*[Reprinted from Vol. XVII of the Transactions of the American Public Health  
Association.]*



Concord, N. H. :

REPUBLICAN PRESS ASSOCIATION, RAILROAD SQUARE.

1892.





## LAND LIBERATION AS A PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURE.

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At the last meeting of this Association I had the honor to present to your indulgent attention a paper on the relation, as I conceived it, that land monopoly, or the existing system of private ownership of land, bears to public health, especially as the question presents itself in connection with city populations. I sought therein to show that such a system was inimical to the best sanitary and vital interests of the people, inasmuch as its inevitable tendency was to produce an overcrowded condition of the human inhabitants, housed in tenements or hovels as the case may be, and which congestion fostered the development and favored the spread of all those diseases which modern hygiene finds it most difficult to cope with and subdue.

In that paper I contented myself with pointing out this fact, and assigning the cause, as I understood it; and if such is the natural necessary result of the present system of land-holding, then it is a further duty incumbent on those who hold such views to proceed further, and indicate what in their opinion is the cure for such serious defects in the social and sanitary economy of our times; for surely civilization cannot normally advance, when in the heart of our greatest cities there arise to constant view spectacles of want, misery, disease, and crime that cannot be matched in savage lands.

If such a wrong exists, in the nature of things there must be a remedy; and many thoughtful people have come to the conclusion that this remedy will be found in such an alteration of our laws as shall fundamentally change the conditions under which land is now treated and held.

If the proportions of the evil indicated are, as many contend, of such magnitude as to threaten already the foundations of social order and test to the utmost the genuineness of our civilization, then no prophet's warning should be needed, in this country at least, before the remedy is found and applied which shall harmlessly dissipate the explosive forces now generating, and establish justice and tranquillity between man and man where now wrong and discontent prevail.

In my individual experience concerning this matter, the true cause of the spectacles of sickness and suffering, misery, destitution, squalor, sin, and crime, abounding among a city's population, as for a number of years they were presented almost daily to my view in public hospitals, dispensaries, poor-houses, tenements, and slums, was an insoluble problem which

constantly perplexed me until I happened on some of the writings of Henry George which treated of the land question, when all difficulties vanished, and I stood amazed that an explanation, at once so simple, sufficient, and true, had not occurred to me before. For it was at once very plain that as land is a provision of nature for the use of man, and that he cannot live without it and must live on and from it, the person who can get a monopoly possession of land enjoys an unfair and very great advantage over his fellows, equally deserving naturally, as they must buy from him the right to use the earth on such terms and conditions as may please him, and to which their necessities compel acquiescence.

The sanitary mischief flowing from the exercise of this power may be most grave, and this is largely determined by the financial ability of the applicants or occupiers to pay rent, or to buy their right to live; and it is my belief that this system is responsible, directly and indirectly, for more of the evil conditions present among city populations than arise from any other cause, or perhaps all other causes.

The remedy proposed for this evident inequality and wrong in our present method of dealing with land is, briefly, the application of the single tax, the elements of which no doubt are familiar to those now present, and concerning which it is a matter of regret that the name so inadequately expresses all that is embraced by it,—the nature of the proposed reform, its far-reaching scope, utility, etc.; for in my opinion no social movement of the past hundred years is, or has been, so big with possibilities for good to the human race as this one.

Apart from its purely fiscal aspect as an ideal method of raising public revenues, it has moral, social, and economic sides equally interesting; and these being intimately related to affairs of daily life and living, questions of individual and public health naturally come up for consideration in this connection.

If the rise and progress of civilization be in accordance with the laws of human development, the observed tendency of such development being to aggregate man into communities large or small, and as his enlightened reasonable wants under such conditions are vastly greater and more complex than when in a less advanced social state, then there should be some natural provision of a fund out of which all such public wants could be satisfied.

Single tax men hold that nature in this respect has made no default, that such a fund does exist, that it grows with the growth of population and is in strict relation to population, that every increase whether of infant or adult adds definitely to that fund, and that this law is as universal and unailing in operation as that which brings the milk to the mother's breast for the nourishment of the new-born child.

As things now are, the men who own the ground are the ones who reap the benefit of this result of social growth and progress,—the rental value of bare land. They have not made it, but they appropriate it in the form of ground rent; hence, those who are not of the landlord class must buy of



them their right to use a bounty of nature without which life is not possible; for our laws are framed in their interest through a misconception, an economic error in confounding land with property, for no man made land any more than air and sunlight, which are natural provisions for his use, and it is not in his power to add to or diminish their amount in the least.

The supply of available or desirable land is limited, and this leads to its being monopolized by those who speculate in it on the necessities of other people, or hold it out of use until the growth of population has made it valuable, this increment representing the value given to the site by the community as a whole, the landlord thus reaping where he has not sown, out of the necessities, enterprises, and industries of all the people in the place.

The complete application of the single tax presupposes the total abolition of every other means of public revenue, national, state, and local. It of course involves the extinction of all custom-house duties, tariff levies, taxes on trade and industry of every kind, and the centering on land values as the sole source of governmental support.

Economists who hold these views claim that property in the right meaning of the word embraces everything, and only those things, produced by human labor, and that to tax such products is to discourage production, embarrass enterprise, and levy a fine on industry; and, moreover, that the moral effect of attempts to do this is bad, leading to discontent, concealment, false returns, and perjury,—the weight of taxation falling on the poor, or on those whose property is in plain sight of the tax-gatherer and who are least able to bear it, while the rich are, to a great extent, able to evade their just share of taxation.

If this form of taxation were abolished, the people who constitute the bulk of our population, the wage-earners, would experience immediate relief in their struggle for existence, the material effect of the change being described as follows:

“In the first place, all taxes that now fall upon the exertion of labor or capital would be abolished. No one would be taxed for building a house or improving a farm or opening a mine, for bringing in things from foreign countries, or for adding in any way to the stock of things that satisfy human wants and constitute national wealth. Every one would be free to make and save wealth; to buy, sell, give, or exchange, without let or hindrance, any article of human production the use of which did not involve any public injury. All those taxes which increase prices as things pass from hand to hand, falling finally upon the consumer, would disappear. Buildings or other fixed improvements would be as secure as now, and could be bought and sold, as now, subject to the tax or ground rent due to the community for the ground on which they stood. Houses and the ground they stand on, or other improvements and the land they are made on, would also be rented as now. But the amount the tenant would have to pay would be less than now, since the taxes now levied on buildings or improvements fall ultimately (save in decaying communities) on the user, and the tenant would therefore get the benefit of their abolition. And in this reduced rent the tenant would pay all those taxes that he now has to pay in addition to his rent,—any remainder of what he paid on account of the ground going not to increase the wealth of the landlord, but to add to a fund in which the tenant himself would be an equal sharer.

In the second place, a large and constantly increasing fund would be provided for



common uses, without any tax on the earnings of labor or on the returns of capital—a fund which in well settled countries would not only suffice for all of what are now considered necessary expenses of government, but would leave a large surplus to be devoted to purposes of general benefit.

In the third place, and most important of all, the monopoly of land would be abolished, and land would be thrown open and kept open to the use of labor, since it would be unprofitable for any one to hold land without putting it to its full use, and both the temptation and the power to speculate in natural opportunities would be gone. The speculative value of land would be destroyed as soon as it was known that, no matter whether land was used or not, the tax would increase as fast as the value increased; and no one would want to hold land that he did not use. With the disappearance of the capitalized or selling value of the land, the premium which must now be paid as purchase-money by those who wish to use land would disappear, differences in the value of land being measured by what would have to be paid for it to the community, nominally in taxes but really in rent. So long as any unused land remained, those who wished to use it could obtain it, not only without the payment of any purchase price, but without the payment of any tax or rent. Nothing would be required for the use of land till less advantageous land came into use, and possession thus gave an advantage over and above the return to the labor and capital expended upon it, and no matter how much the growth of population and the progress of society increased the value of land, this increase would go to the whole community, swelling that general fund in which the poorest would be an equal sharer with the richest.”—Protection or Free Trade, Chap. xxvi.

Now with this prosperous change effected through the operation of equal laws, and by securing to all the right to make use of natural opportunities as they may desire in the production of wealth, it requires no vivid imagination to perceive the gain to public health that would follow. A most noticeable effect would appear in the ability of every family to have a house of their own, each according to the means possessed; and it can hardly be disputed that the hygienic dispersal of the populations now congested and compacted in tenements and slum districts furnishes the key to the whole problem of city sanitation, as it relates to the control and suppression of communicable diseases. By this general movement chronic fever-nests and hot-beds of disease coming down from former generations would be abandoned, and even if the seeds of disease were carried with them by the departing occupants and developed in their new homes, effectual isolation could be enforced, and the general sanitary management to prevent its spread simplified and made more perfect, as is shown now in dealing with such contingencies in families occupying separate domiciles.

Of course, a change so profoundly affecting present customs and modes of thought could, probably, only gradually be brought about, although in this country the effective introduction of the single tax waits only on legislative enactment, or, perhaps, on constitutional amendment, and the effect on public health would appear at first but slowly; for the accumulated weight of generations of morbidity and physical wrong-doing would not vanish from the race in a day, but the start in the right direction being made and continued, a degree of general physical health and excellence would be attained such as tradition and history ascribe to man in earlier ages.

It is not argued that the introduction of the proposed remedy would



operate as a cure-all for every social defect or disorder; and while it is urged in this connection solely as a potent, practical public health factor, at the same time its application would render the accomplishment of other needed reforms vastly more easy, as those who have looked into it have been led to believe. And while desiring here to emphasize only the sanitary aspect of the matter, and leave its other features to those who may choose to lay stress upon them, I feel that I cannot do better in closing than to give the words of Mr. George himself, as follows :

“For what is the core, the essence of our belief—we who, for want of a better word, call ourselves single-tax men? It is that there is in social relations as in physical relations a law, an order—a law which everywhere coincides with the moral law; an order which shows intelligence and beneficence. The simple yet far-reaching reform that we urge is to us no ingenious scheme devised by human wit, no deftly invented panacea to cure human ills. It is something far simpler, yet transcendently grander: it is the conformation of human law to the supreme law of justice. . . . The injustice, the want, the suffering, growing out of bitter poverty on the one side and monstrous wealth on the other, that so threaten and perplex the world to-day, raise no doubt in our minds of the existence and beneficence of a supreme intelligence. . . . We see, in the material provision made for men, room for all, work for all, abundance for all, and opportunities of leisure and the fullest development for all, conditioned only on men's obedience to the moral law that teaches us to give each his right; to do to others as we would have others do to us. We see that in the most highly developed civilization there is no difficulty in securing to all an equal share in their Creator's bounty, but that in the divine forethought a provision has been made by virtue of which the very growth of society, by increasing land values, provides a fund adequate for all the increasing needs of society, and that to apply this to its intended purpose would be to make the growth of civilization an advance toward greater and greater equality. And thus we see that the evils which afflict the world, and which to so many shut out the idea of the moral government of the universe, spring really from the wrong that disinherits the masses of all share in their birthright, and turns into the reward of greed and the incentive to forestalling the provision designed to supply the wants of society and promote equality.”—*The Standard*, No. 242.







